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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 001973

SIPDIS

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER  
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY  
PARIS FOR C. NEARY  
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [EAID](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: MUNICIPAL POLITICS TESTING THE MDC

REF: A. HARARE 01935

[B](#). HARARE 1731

[C](#). HARARE 1555

[D](#). HARARE 1491

Classified By: Political Officer Audu Besmer for reasons 1.5 b/d

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Saddled with the responsibility to provide services in often far-flung communities, new MDC mayors' and councils' effectiveness will be constrained by legal battles, a lack of resources, and the threat of interference from the Ministry of Local Government. The MDC's victories in recent mayoral and urban council elections represent notable political victories, but it is unclear how prepared the opposition party is to exploit them. So far, the government has continued to hamstring the MDC mayor of Harare but has not acted significantly against newly elected officials. END SUMMARY.

#### MDC Municipal Gains

[1](#)2. (U) Though the overall voter turnout in the August 30-31 mayoral and urban council elections was low, the MDC won six out of eight mayoral slots and 135 urban council seats to ZANU-PF's 132 (Ref B). The modest margin of MDC's majority of urban council seats understates its relative popularity vis-a-vis the ruling party. First, of the 132 seats that went to ZANU-PF, 44 were uncontested after MDC candidates were prevented from registering and running (Ref D). In addition, the MDC had important wins in the largest population centers -- six of the nation's seven largest urban centers. The council seats which MDC won nationwide represent about 1.5 million people, whereas the council seats that ZANU-PF gained represent only about 500,000 people. (Comment: Comparatively large councils appear to be skewed in favor of ZANU-PF strongholds. End Comment.)

#### Harare Mayor Hemmed in by Legal Wrangles, Limited Party Support

[1](#)3. (C) On September 17, the High Court deferred a decision on Minister of Local Government Ignatius Chombo's application to confirm a provisional order barring suspended MDC Mayor Elias Mudzuri from performing council duties - effectively solidifying the Mayor's suspension (Ref A). Mudzuri has been trying to meet with councilors and other partners informally, at least to keep abreast of city business; it is unclear to what extent he will continue those efforts given this recent ruling. He is still living in the official residence, and has the official car and fuel, but is not receiving his salary.

[1](#)4. (C) The head of the Ministry-appointed commission to investigate Mudzuri, Jemison Kurasha, told poloff on September 20 that the problem between the Minister and the Mayor was not simply a personal one but a cultural one as well. The Minister and Mayor appeared to clash over patronage in the culture of corruption within Harare's city government. The commission, though in existence since April, first called Mudzuri in for an interview only on September [1](#)9. Kurasha said they should issue their report in a month or so; however, Mike Davies, Chairman of the Combined Harare Residents' Association (CHRA), said there was absolutely no pressure on the commission to complete its investigation.

[1](#)5. (C) Compounding Mudzuri's difficulties are his strained relations with the MDC leadership. In a conversation with Ambassador Sullivan on September 17, the Mayor criticized the party leadership for not doing more to support him. He complained that they were largely quiet about his travails publicly, and had done nothing to rein in the Deputy Mayor. According to MDC Director for Presidential Affairs Gandhi Mudzingwa, a close protegee of party leader Morgan Tsvangirai, the MDC leadership had questions about the professionalism of Mudzuri's decisions on hirings and firings, and tender awards while he was in office. Mudzingwa suggested that at the very least Mudzuri might have been overzealous - incontinently angering ZANU-PF officials.

16. (C) In August, Chombo postponed indefinitely elections for a new Deputy Mayor - previously scheduled for that month - pending the outcome of an investigation into Mudzuri's activities as mayor. This was generally viewed as a maneuver to keep the current MDC (but GOZ-friendly) Deputy Mayor in office and effectively controlling the city's affairs. Mudzuri told Ambassador Sullivan on September 17 that the Deputy Mayor had refused to communicate with him for some time. The Ministry of Local Government also attempted to suspend six Harare city councilors, the new heads of several important committees, in a move seen as intended to undercut the MDC-led administration of city affairs and to prevent a vote on a new Deputy Mayor. On September 11, the High Court ruled against the Ministry and nullified the councilors' suspensions.

17. (C) A September 25 council meeting descended into a shouting match and was prematurely adjourned over the suspension and reinstatement of three council employees. Davies said Deputy Mayor Sekesai Makwavarara recently reinstated the suspended employees with the support of a GOZ-friendly faction of about 10-12 councilors led by Mt. Pleasant councilor Chris Mushonga. The council's executive committee, which has authority for hiring and firing, authorized the suspensions over the past year but not the reinstatements. Davies said there are about 10-12 councilors who are toeing the MDC line, and an additional 20 or so who, probably from inexperience, are susceptible to political pressure. Of the 45 Harare city councilors, 44 are from the MDC, one is from ZANU-PF.

#### Mayor Working Again in Chegutu

18. (C) On July 31 the previous ZANU-PF-dominated city council of Chegutu voted to suspend MDC Mayor of Chegutu Francis Dhlakama and to withdraw all benefits of his office (Ref C). But the High Court on August 6 decided that the suspension was illegal. The Mayor took a vacation, and on September 1 was physically threatened by the then Deputy Mayor when he tried to return to work. Dhlakama spoke to Minister Chombo, who in turn called the Chegutu Deputy Mayor and ordered him to allow Dhlakama to return to work.

19. (C) The Ministry of Local Government had audited the previous council's books and in a July report exposed rampant corruption. The report implicated members of the previous Chegutu council who Dhlakama said were involved in a scam to skim tax funds without the blessing of ZANU-PF higher-ups (Ref C). According to Dhlakama the Minister approved the auditing procedure because he wanted to root out rogue corruption. The audit was more damning than the Minister expected, however, and it raised questions about the Minister's own connections to some of the malfeasance. As a result, the GOZ has taken no corrective action except to effectively replace the entire council with a new ZANU-PF one in the August local elections (Ref D). (Comment: It is possible that Chombo facilitated Dhlakama's return as Mayor to ameliorate a backlash against ZANU-PF in Chegutu from the audit. End Comment.)

#### MDC Municipal Strategy/Seminar

10. (C) On September 20, three MDC provincial heads met with eleven existing and newly elected MDC mayors in Matopos (outside Bulawayo) for a strategy seminar. The newly elected Mayor of Gwanda (Matabeleland South), Dr. Thandeko Mnkandhla, said that the seminar covered basic topics such as how to work with the city council, mayoral authority under the Urban Councils Act, and advice on cooperating with the Ministry of Local Government while not submitting to irregular Ministerial demands. Bulawayo Mayor Japhet Ncube told us that the mayors agreed they should avoid fights with the Ministry which could disrupt city operations, since it would be the MDC mayors who would be blamed for the resulting paralysis of city government. Earlier this month, Mudzingwa said the basic message would be to stick together, not to lose focus, and to choose carefully how to react to likely GOZ interference to disrupt civic administration. (Note: Although the Minister stated publicly that he would be meeting with all new mayors, so far, he has yet to call any meetings with the MDC mayors. Furthermore he has not responded to invitations from MDC mayors to attend their inauguration ceremonies. End Note).

11. (C) A common concern at the seminar was the abhorrent financial situation each Mayor inherited from the previous ZANU-PF mayors - all their city treasuries were in the red - and how to deliver basic city services while in debt. (Note: The August 30 - 31 elections were the first in those towns which the MDC contested since the party was formed in 1999. End Note.) MDC leaders stressed that the mayors should focus on visible deliverables, and seek outside assistance from NGOs and Embassies, as the traditional grants from the Ministry were unlikely to be forthcoming or sufficient. All

acknowledged that with today's inflation, local taxes on residents would not cover the cost of basic city services.

COMMENT

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112. (C) In many ways, municipal politics can be expected to reflect the larger relationship between the parties here, with the ruling party employing legal and administrative harassment and its command of the purse-strings to undermine MDC effectiveness. (The Urban Councils Act gives wide scope for the Ministry of Local Government to intervene in municipal affairs.) Although the Ministry of Local Government has been relatively inactive against most newly elected, MDC-led municipalities so far, that may change once it has taken the measure of each and evaluated respective vulnerabilities. Some local officials may attract ruling party efforts at co-opting; given the difficult operating environment and constituency pressure to deliver, some will likely be enticed, which could contribute to intra-party tensions. As the capital city, Harare's MDC presence can be expected to attract special pressure from the ruling party, as evidenced by Mudzuri's continuing woes.

113. (C) Municipal politics will be an increasingly important battleground. Because so many municipal seats are occupied by the opposition, both parties recognize that relevant municipalities can be taken as a laboratory for the MDC's capacity to govern. In the finger-pointing between municipalities and the Ministry that inevitably will emerge over municipal services, media management will be crucial to the MDC in getting its message to the electorate. The silencing of The Daily News and other government suppression of independent media will handicap MDC efforts in that respect. The MDC leadership's relative lack of support for Mayor Mudzuri -- the most powerful elected position held by the MDC -- is curious. The missed opportunities to make more political hay of the Mayor's plight may be attributed in part to personality differences, but may also reflect troublesome institutional neglect by a distracted party.

SULLIVAN